

**2002 Proud Partner  
Transportation Scholar Report**

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National Capital Parks–Central  
July 2003**



**Experience Your America**

## **Project Status Report**

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Length of Assignment: 1 Year

The Memorial Core in Washington, D.C. is host to over 20 million visitors per year, and comprises many of the most important natural and cultural resources of the Nation's Capital. National Capital Parks—Central maintains and protects many sites within the area, including: the Washington Monument, the Lincoln, Jefferson, and Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorials, Ford's Theatre, the Korean War and Vietnam Veterans Memorials, Pennsylvania Avenue National Historic Park, the National Mall, East and West Potomac Parks, Constitution Gardens, commemorative statues, and numerous other historic sites, memorials, and parklands. There is also a great potential for growth in visitation in the coming decades with the addition of new memorials to significant events and persons such as World War II and Martin Luther King, Jr. within this area.

The National Park Service (NPS) has made considerable progress over the last year in moving toward the necessary planning to determine the best and most appropriate future transportation services to serve future visitors in the Washington, DC and Memorial Core areas. Prior to July 2002, the NPS had undertaken preliminary planning efforts and identified necessary steps. One very important short term step was identified: complete necessary data collection and inform the planning process. The primary component of that effort is collection of visitor survey data to understand the market for visitor transportation services.

As the Alternative Transportation project progressed, significant data gaps became apparent, particularly in the realm of visitor statistics and the future market demand for unknown and unproven transportation systems being proposed in the Memorial Core area. The further development of viable transportation alternatives has been hindered by the lack of accurate visitation statistics for all areas and destinations potentially being served by future transportation systems. There is limited information on how visitors move around within the Washington, DC area and specifically within the Memorial Core during their stay. Missing information included: visitation and movement patterns among the various sites, modes of transportation used, price elasticity for various transportation options, etc.

Over the course of the past year, National Capital Parks – Central, in conjunction with other area National Capital Region parks, undertook a comprehensive visitor survey to fill the transportation market demand data gap. The survey collected extensive data on visitor transportation patterns, demand, preferences as well as exploring interpretive transportation issues, such as levels of interpretation and demand for themed interpretation. The survey included two parts. Part one, an on-site survey, explored market demand, modes of use, experiences and preferences, visitor demographics and visitor stay demographics. Part two, a mail-back survey, consisted of a detail trip diary, including order of sites visited, number per day, mode used to travel between sites and stops made along the way for food, shopping or other trip incidentals. This level of detailed data has never been collected in the Washington, DC area, and will provide the NPS with significant information to help plan for future services.

It is important that the data be as accurate and complete as possible; therefore, the high, reliable response rates were key to the project. Working through the federal Office of Management and Budget to carefully design a survey which could collect the necessary data and still receive the necessary response rates was an important step in the visitor survey process. With the help of the NPS Social Sciences office, the park and the region developed a survey that met all federal requirements and with the innovative use of incentives achieve optimal response rates.

Incentives for participation in the survey included water bottle-carrying lanyards, embossed with the National Park Service name and website as well as the name and website of one of our partners, the Greater Washington National Parks Fund. This incentive was paired with bottles of cold water, and not only provided the visitor with a memento of their visit, but much needed water as they move through the hot Washington weather. In addition, to the lanyards and water bottles and in recognition of the value of the National Park rangers as assets to the NPS, on a first-come, first-serve basis some visitors received tickets to special NPS Ranger-led tours or tickets to visit the top of the Washington Monument. Visitors who completed and returned the mail-back survey received a further incentive: a copy of a Washington, DC Souvenir book with color photos and descriptions of area sites in five languages. In total, these survey incentives were a creative way to thank the visitors for their participation and provided them with a unique visit experience.

Survey data was collected in both the spring and summer and the final survey results is not yet available. Preliminary spring response rates exceeded set goals and it is expected that summer response rates will be similar. Survey data was collected from more than an estimated 1,200 visitors to area destinations all over the metropolitan area, including both NPS and non-NPS destinations. Survey data results will be available to the public and will likely assist many area agencies, such as the Smithsonian Institution and the National Gallery of Art, in serving future visitors.

In addition to the design and implementation of the visitor survey, the NPS has collected local market data on comparable interpretive transportation services available to visitors. The Washington, DC Local Comparables Report was also prepared as part of the 2002 Proud Partner Transportation Scholar report and is included with these materials. The collection and compilation of information on existing tour transportation services has also never been done before for the NPS in the Washington, DC area. The data will further help the NPS understand the local market for visitor transportation services as well as understand the variety of alternatives available for consideration of future service types.

Utilizing these data collection efforts, the next step for the Alternative Transportation study will be to undertake the federally required planning process and to do so in the most informed and transparent manner possible. Initiating the public planning process will include public meetings, a website and press releases and a public information initiative, such as newsletters. The public will be involved at every step of the planning

process from initial identification and scoping of service alternatives for consideration to feedback on alternatives analysis and findings. This process is expected to begin in the fall of 2003 and is planned for completion by the winter of 2004/2005.

Given the complex planning environment of Washington, DC there are many challenges facing the planning process, such inclusion of many stakeholders and the non-traditional public of park visitors in the planning process and necessary consideration of impacts on a large metropolitan area and population. The metropolitan setting and geographically dispersed nature of the park resources within the National Capital Region and specifically within National Capital Parks – Central demands a greater level of planning coordination with area agencies and presents great transportation planning challenges. Moving through a thorough and comprehensively public planning process will be necessary and incumbent to planning for future services.

## Work Tasks

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1. Alternative Transportation System
  - Task 1: Coordinate data collection and meetings with NPS staff and consulting staff.
  - Task 2: Track other related area transportation studies, including tour bus operations, circulator studies, etc.
2. Technical Project Support
  - Task 1: Statement(s) of Work & Project Agreement Assistance
  - Task 2: Assist in Management of A/E Contractor Technical Efforts
  - Task 3: Contractor Data Support - Provision of Data and Internal Data Collection
  - Task 4: Preparation of Technical Study (supplemental to contractor materials)- Washington Metro Area Comparable/Competitive Transit Matrix

As the project has not yet reached the Alternatives Development and Evaluation phase the following work tasks could not be completed.

3. Public Involvement Support
  - a. Agency Coordination (Internal & External)
    - Task 1: Facilitate Necessary Stakeholder Coordination
  - b. Visitor Involvement Coordination
    - Task 1: Facilitate Necessary Visitor Coordination
    - Task 2: Assist Management of Public Meeting Scheduling and Logistics

Alternatively, the following tasks were added:

- Task 1: Assist in development and design of visitor survey.
- Task 2: Coordinate survey design and approval between the Office of Management and Budget, NPS Social Sciences office and park contractors.
- Task 3: Manage survey efforts, including site selection and coordination and incentives procurement and partner coordination.

## **Work Products**

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### Washington, DC Local Comparables Report

Technical evaluation of comparable Washington area transit services, e.g. Old Town Trolley, to inform the evaluation of alternatives and selection of a preferred alternative. The evaluation will focus on a matrix that compares service types, areas served, any interpretive/informational services included, fare structures and transit modes of area transit services. The report will also include preliminary evaluation of partnership possibilities as additional background information for the evaluation of alternative transportation systems.<sup>1</sup>

This report is accompanied by a Microsoft Access Data Base of tour operators and area destinations.

### Project Status Report: Goals & Next Steps

This report will evaluate the alternative transportation planning study (to-date) for visitors to the Memorial Core and outline progress made within the one year time frame. Project goals, challenges and innovative tools for transportation planning will be highlighted. Findings should summarize expected project outcomes as well as necessary next steps toward those outcomes.

In addition, the Project Status Report provided above, a summary presentation is included in Microsoft Powerpoint format.

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<sup>1</sup> The inclusion of “preliminary evaluation of partnership possibilities” was deemed premature for inclusion in the Washington, DC Comparables report as the planning process and public involvement to identify future alternatives for transportation service have not yet been identified and cannot therefore be analyzed for partnership opportunities.